



PRE-SERVICE SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE EFFICACY OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PROMOTING POLITICAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study investigates pre-service Social Studies teachers' perception of the efficacy of social media in promoting political education. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design using a total of one hundred and fifty (150) pre-service Social Studies teachers from Emmanuel Alanyande College of Education, Oyo. Three (3) research questions were raised to guide the study. The instrument used for data collection was validated by Experts in the Departments of Social Studies and Computer Science. Data were analysed using mean and rank order. The results among others show that the Social Studies students are active users of social media for different political activities such as political discussions, political advocacy; political news/issues sharing, writing of assignment especially on socio-political topics, among others. Also, the pre-service Social Studies teachers have positive perception of the efficacy of social media in promoting political education. Thus, pre-service Social Studies teachers should be encouraged to use social media in learning political-related topics and courses in Social Studies.

Keywords: Political education, Pre-service Social Studies teachers, Social media, Socio-political issues, Political participation

Introduction

The growth of modern technology especially, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the ever changing complex societies of the world have revolutionized the way and manner information gathering and dissemination are

carried out. For instance, the advent of internet as a modern information and communication means has exposed majority of global population to different interactive platforms on which different kinds of information are exchanged which might have significant effect on human behaviour, decision and judgment. With this development, people have the opportunity of being abreast of happenings which are near and at the same time far. The internet has become the biggest technological revolution of the 21st century with a sizeable number of the population of the world having access to it. It is now the biggest market place where one can find products, services, information, ideas and knowledge at the mere click of a button. Significant changes in industries, education, agriculture, medicine, engineering, politics and other fields have been brought about by ICT (Wilson & Boldeman, 2017). Modern technology especially those of the internet facilities provide efficient, cost-effective and convenient sharing of vital information among the people via online media tools known as the social media. New technology and social media have impact on political communication in both developed and developing countries, although developed countries experience larger impact because of proliferation of the internet (Parker, 2015).

The history of social media starts in the early 21st century. However, the popularity of social media sites and usage of their application was raised with the arrival of YouTube, Facebook and Twitter in 2005 & 2006 respectively. In 2009 and 2010, WhatsApp, Instagram, telegram was launched. The various social networking sites have grabbed the attention of individuals, societies and captured the social media world to a large extent. Numerous social networking applications are also available to facilitate their users (Baumgartner & Morris 2010).

Social media are a relatively new information network and communication technology using a form of interactive and user-produced content, and interpersonal relationships are created. This addition in technology narrowed the communication gaps between individuals, societies, and countries as well. Information is now distributed at a high speed, low cost and broad scope and as a result of this, there is egalitarian access to the production and the consumption of news (Mbetera, 2015). Today, social media have turned the world into a global village, with the quick transfer of information overriding the challenges of time and distance. Social media have influenced the society and this influence is based exclusively on its social aspect of interaction and participation.

As social media gain more popularity and scope, its impact on the society as a whole cannot be underestimated as social media practically influence the social, economic, political, cultural, among other aspects of a country. Attitudes and decisions on social, cultural and political issues in today's world are majorly based on information read and shared on social media. The intensity and speed of news items posted online can be a cause of stress for politicians who are forced to respond almost immediately in today's political climate. Unlike in the past where politicians would only be required to issue a press release which would be broadcasted through the mass media (television, radio or newspaper). With the aid of social media, there is perfect access to all sides of a story, a utopia of limitless information in a society that was considered shielded in the past. This is so, since alternative media are freely accessible online.

Due to the effectiveness of social media in the sharing of entertaining, informative and educative messages, the relatively new media is handy for political education of the people especially the youths who form a greater number of those with access to social media channels. Manfra (2020) is of the view that the "new media can have an impact by helping to transform individuals and give them new competencies that empower them in politics". Also commenting on the effectiveness of the social media for political education, Mahmud and Amin (2019) note that, the people rely on the internet and social media networks to build their understanding on political related issues and policies formulation which will equip them with the knowledge necessary for their voting decisions. In fact, the social media can serve as potent tools in educating the people about the electoral processes. The people can be educated about political parties, their candidates and manifestoes. That is, the social media helps in the formation of the opinions and attitudes of the people as regards the existing political parties, candidates and their promises. Homes (2020) states that "citizens' access to electronic social media empower them to be actively involved in democratic governance". In the Nigerian political system, the use of social media became more pronounced in the 2011, 2015, 2019 and in the preparations for 2023 General Elections especially among the youths (Abdulrauf, 2020 & Fasae, 2019). Most political aspirants in Nigeria use Facebook, Twitter, Naija Pals, Nairaland, among others, to engage the youths in discussing their political programmes and policies. For instance, Roberts (2016) writes that the social media is acting as a new way for common people to become increasingly educated on politics.

Political Education is an essential element for the development and consolidation of democratic societies, and also an indispensable tool for the success of political parties (Amna & Ekeman, 2013). In general, political education comprises all those processes that influence and shape people politically as members of a social and political system. In a more specific sense, political education refers to consciously planned and organized activities of formal institutions to train and prepare youths for their active participation in political and social life. Basically, Political education aims to develop and strengthen awareness about the values of a liberal democracy, transmit understanding of the main political institutions (parliament, government, elections and voting, political parties), and the functioning of the political decision-making process, to promote basic knowledge in political issues and to teach certain skills such as how to approach information media. Students actively share political information by sharing opinions and discussing issues around politics in class discussions especially, when treating political related topics/courses (Arshad & Hassan, 2019).

Social Studies as one of the school subjects influences the social and political learning of citizens especially the youth through political-related courses and social media which students interact with. In Social Studies, NCE curriculum, political related courses such as Nigeria political life, Nigeria's External Education, Social Institutions, Man and His Government, Globalisation, among others, are offered by students. Since democratic education frames the purposes of Social Studies education and since access to adequate information is an important aspect of democratic participation and deliberation, then, Social Studies teachers should encourage the use of Social media for students to be well informed especially, as regards socio-political issues as this might help in the understanding of socio-political related courses in the subject. With the appropriate use of social media, students develop online reasoning, navigate political bias, and perhaps engage in participatory online politics (Omotayo, 2018). The pre-service social studies teachers' perception of the efficacy or otherwise of social media in promoting political education has implications for its acceptability and usability. If the students of Social Studies see the social media as having impact on the political-related courses done in Social Studies curriculum, they will develop more interest in using social media, but if their perception of the efficacy of in promoting political education social media is negative, then, the reverse would be case. According to Ahmad (2019), some

students find social media interesting in reading political news online and even do Social Studies assignment through the use of social media. Although, Dalton (2018) claims increase in political education and participation among the youth is driven by growth in social and civic education, yet, Ezema (2015) contends that frequent access to political information at any time through social media especially Facebook and Whatsapp complement these roles as it provides an important backdrop for youths' cognitive development especially in political related courses in Social Studies curriculum.

The findings of Abdulrauf (2020) on cognitive engagement and online political participation on Facebook and Twitter among youths in Nigeria and Malaysia reveal that access to political information on Facebook and Twitter was one of the factors that influence online political education and participation of youths via Facebook and Twitter among the youths.

Jamil (2018) also found a significant relationship between social media usage and political participation and education among Nigerian youths. These studies have been able to reveal increasing use of social media for political education and participation among youths.

Based on the foregoing, the paper investigates the perceptions of pre-service Social Studies teachers towards the usage of social media as instrument of political education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to find out the perceptions of pre-service Social Studies teachers towards social media as instrument of political education. Specifically, the study aims at

- investigating into the types of social media students of Social Studies use for political education.
- finding out the types of political activities which social studies students use social media to participate in leading to political education.
- examining the perceptions of pre-service social studies teachers towards social media as instrument of political education.

Research Questions

1. What types of social media do students of Social Studies use for political education?

2. What are the types of political activities Social Studies students participate in social media for political education?
3. What are the perceptions of Social Studies students towards the social media as instrument of political education?

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design. This design is adopted because it is highly capable of describing the attitudes, opinions o characteristics of a population. Simple random sampling technique was used in selecting the participants for this study. A total of one hundred and fifty (150) participants (pre-service Social Studies teachers) from the Social Studies Department, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo in Atiba Local Government Area of Oyo State. The instrument used for the study was a twenty item questionnaire with structured items related to the topic of study. The items were structured on a four-point Likert Scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

The questionnaire instrument was face and content validated by one Social Studies expert from the Department of Social Studies, EACOED, Oyo and one Information and Communication Technology (ICT) expert from the Department of Computer Science, EACOED, Oyo. The test-retest method was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument using twenty-five (25) Social Studies students (from Oyo State College of Education, Lanlate) who were not part of the sample of the study. The scores were analysed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) and this yielded a coefficient of internal consistency of 0.76. Data collected were analyzed through tables, mean and rank order.

Results and Discussion

Data collected on the study were subjected to analysis based on the three research questions raised for the study. The mean cut-off mark is set at 2.50. Any mean score below 2.50 is regarded as not significant while mean score above 2.50 is regarded as being significant. The results are presented at thus:

Research Question 1: What types of social media do students of Social Studies use for political education?

Table 1: Analysis of social media type used by students of Social Studies for political education

S/N	Social Media Type Used	Mean	Rank order
1.	Facebook	3.63	1 st
2.	WhatsApp	3.60	2 nd
3.	Instagram	3.54	3 rd
4.	WeChat	3.28	9 th
5.	Imo	3.32	7 th
6.	Twitter	3.50	4 th
7.	Telegram	2.89	10 th
8.	Yahoo Messenger	3.45	5 th
9.	YouTube	3.42	6 th
10.	2go	3.30	8 th

Weighted Mean = 3.39

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork (2020).

Table 1 shows the mean ratings of items 1-10, ranging from 2.89 to 3.63. It also shows the rank order of the items starting from the 1st to 10th rank. All the mean scores are greater than the mean cut-off mark of 2.50. Hence, all the mean scores are significant. This indicates that students of Social Studies use the social media network frequently for political education and participation.

The findings of this study also revealed Facebook (3.63) was the most used social media for political education and participation by the pre-service Social Studies teachers. This is followed by WhatsApp (3.60), Instagram (3.54), Twitter (3.50), Yahoo Messenger (3.45), YouTube (3.42), Imo (3.32), 2go (3.30), WeChat (3.28) and Telegram (2.89) respectively. It showed that students visit these social media sites to get their assignment done, share and discuss political issues in order to remain up to date with trending events. This finding is consistent with the findings of Ezema (2015), Fasae (2019), and Omotayo (2018) who have confirmed that Nigerian youths are active users of social networking media especially that of Facebook, WhasApp, Instagram, Twitter, among others. Supporting this claim is Wilson and Boldeman (2017), who posited that youths are ICT natives and prolific users of technologies.

Research Question 2: What are the types of political activities Social Studies students participate in social media for political education?

Table 2: Distribution of types of political activities participated in with social media by students of Social Studies

S/N	Political Activities	Mean	Rank order
1.	Political discussions	3.61	3 rd
2.	Political campaigns	3.60	4 th
3.	Voters' registration	2.40	10 th
4.	Sharing political issues/news	3.72	1 st
5.	Writing assignment on political-related issues	3.60	4 th
6.	Writing petitions	3.45	9 th
7.	Analyzing political issues/events objectively	3.50	8 th
8.	Monitoring and reporting electoral malpractices	3.58	6 th
9.	Communicating with Politicians	3.53	7 th
10.	Political Advocacy	3.64	2 nd

Weighted Mean = 3.46

Researcher's Fieldwork (2020).

In table 2, the mean ratings of items 1-10 range from 2.40 to 3.72. The rank order of the items starting from the 1st to 10th rank were also shown. All the mean scores except one (item 3) are greater than the mean cut-off mark of 2.50. By implication, all the mean scores except the mean score (2.40) of item 3 are significant. Majorly, pre-service Social Studies teachers use social media to participate in political activities such as for sharing political issues/news (3.72), political advocacy (3.64), political discussions (3.61), political campaigns and writing assignment on political related topics/courses (3.60), monitoring and reporting electoral malpractices (3.58), communicating with politicians (3.53), analyzing political issues/events objectively (3.50) and writing petitions (3.45). Since youths are prolific users of social media, it is easy for them to use it to also participate in political activities. Ahmad (2019) discovered that the younger generations (higher institution students) are very active on social media to participate in online and offline political activities. Findings are also in line with the findings of Ezema (2015), Jamil (2018), Mahmud and Amin (2019) who have found that the youths use social media to participate in both offline and online

politics which influence political education. This result shows that the usage of social media for different political activities has a positive influence on students' political participatory behaviours and also help to understand political related topics/courses especially in Social Studies curriculum better.

Research Question 3: What are the perceptions of Social Studies students towards the social media as instrument of political education?

Table 3: Perceptions of Social Studies Students on the influence of social media on political education

Items	Mean	Rank Order
1. Find social media interesting in reading political news online	3.44	8 th
2. Social media is a potent tool for political education and participation	3.48	6 th
3. Political education of higher institution students has improved due to their use of social media	3.50	5 th
4. Social media help me to understand the political affairs in a better way through the acquisition of political information.	3.52	4 th
5. Social media has helped in improving my interest in political related courses	3.32	9 th
6. I do Social Studies assignment through the use of social media	3.20	10 th
7. Social media makes me to be politically current local and internationally.	3.61	2 nd
8. Social media provide for me the opportunities for political discussion through various online pages	3.67	1 st
9. Social media provides easier access to information on political events	3.46	7 th
10. Social media increases my exposure on socio- political discourse and issues in the society	3.58	3 rd

Weighted Mean = 3.48

Researcher's Fieldwork (2020)

Table 3 shows the mean ratings of items 1-10, ranging from 3.20 to 3.67. The rank order of the items were also shown. All the mean scores are greater than the mean cut-off mark of 2.50, meaning that all the mean scores are significant. This indicates that there is positive perception of social studies students on the influence of Social Studies students on the influence of social media as a potent tool of political education. Pre-service Social Studies teachers are of the view that social media assist them in the better understanding of socio-political topics/courses in the Social Studies curriculum; improves their interest in attending Social Studies classes; help in doing Social Studies assignment, makes them to be politically current locally and internationally, among others. These findings are in tandem with that of the Manfra (2020), Homes (2020), Roberts (2016), and Parker (2015).

Conclusion

Given the growing popularity and penetration of social media and the way they influence peoples' (especially, the young ones) private and public lives, this study adds to the understanding of the different social media types used by the youths especially, pre-service Social Studies teachers for political education, the different political activities carried out by them with the use of social media and the perspectives of pre-service social studies as regards social media as a tool for political education. Evidences from this study thus show that many Social Studies students especially in Emmanuel Alayande College of Education are quite active on social media usage particularly on WhatsApp and Facebook. These platforms are essential in both offline and online political activities thus enhancing political education, knowledge and increasing political participation and inclusion among students. From the findings, it can be argued that the more the students access political information on social media, the more they engage in online political activities like commenting, sharing or liking a political post, video, link or tweet to get educated and acquire more knowledge. And the more engage in political activities on social media the greater their level of offline forms of political participation, and the more their academic achievement in political-related topics in social studies curriculum. Since the aim of the social studies is to educate civically competent democratic citizens, social studies teacher educators must lead the next generation of teachers and students in developing media literacy.

Recommendations

From the findings, and conclusion of the research work, the following recommendations are made:

Social studies teachers should encourage the use of social media in the teaching of political-related topics in the social studies curriculum.

The students should be informed and trained on how best they can use social media platforms to actively engage in political discourse.

There is need for the students to be empowered on the importance of discursive politics that is free of tribalism, hatred, immaturity and ignorance. It is important for the students to air their views responsibly so as not to polarize the country by inciting each other.

Social media users need to be educated on how to identify fake news or propaganda so as to be objective in their discussions. There is need for developing an anti-propaganda social media application that will alert users whenever they come across fake news.

More political actors, including the government agencies, need to embrace these platforms because they are ideal for reaching out to a majority of the students. Further, social media is key in capturing their attention towards political issues.

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